



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

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NEW MANAGEMENT MEASURES PROPOSED FOR THE SHRIMP FISHERY OF THE GULF OF MEXICO (AMENDMENT 11)

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) has submitted Amendment 11 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP). NOAA Fisheries announced the availability of Amendment 11 by publishing a notice in the Federal Register, and by distributing a Southeast Fishery Bulletin (NR01-029) on July 19, 2001. Comments on the Amendment were accepted through September 17, 2001. NOAA Fisheries has now published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on February 25, 2002 that would implement the proposed actions described in Amendment 11. NOAA Fisheries welcomes written comments on the proposed rule (see **Dates and Addresses below**).

The proposed rule would require owners or operators of all boats and vessels harvesting shrimp in the exclusive economic zone of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf EEZ) to obtain a commercial vessel permit for Gulf shrimp; prohibit the use of traps to harvest royal red shrimp in the Gulf EEZ; and prohibit the transfer of royal red shrimp at sea. The following information is a summary of the proposed actions; the public is urged to review the proposed rule and Amendment 11 for full details on the proposed actions. See Dates and Addresses below for information on how to obtain copies.

Commercial Vessel Permit: The shrimp fishery is the largest commercial fishery (in numbers of fishing vessels and participants) in the Gulf of Mexico, but is one of the few federally managed fisheries with no fishing permit requirement. There are no data collection and identification systems that specifically identify shrimp fishing vessels that fish in the Gulf EEZ. The Council determined that an accurate identification of the universe of vessels in the fishery would facilitate scientific assessments of annual fishing effort. This information would enhance the capability to achieve and maintain sustainable fisheries in both the shrimp fishery and those finfish fisheries that are impacted because of the bycatch and bycatch mortality arising from the shrimp fishery.

The proposed rule would require an owner or operator of a vessel that fishes for or possesses shrimp in or from the Gulf EEZ to have onboard a valid commercial Gulf shrimp vessel permit for that vessel. No qualifying criteria are proposed for the Gulf shrimp permit. This permit requirement would become effective 90 days after the effective date of the final rule that would implement Amendment 11.

Permit application forms would be available from the Regional Administrator (RA). The vessel owner (in the case of a corporation, an officer or shareholder; in the case of a partnership, a general partner) would have to submit a completed application form to the RA at least 30 days prior to the date on which the applicant desires to have the permit made effective. Any delay in submitting a completed application could delay an applicant's receipt of the permit, and thus, preclude legal fishing for Gulf shrimp until the permit could be issued. All vessel permits would be mailed to owners, whether the applicant is an owner or an operator. A fee, not to exceed the cost of issuing the permit, would be charged for each application and would be specified on the application form.

The non-transferrable permit would be valid for one year from when it is issued unless it is revoked, suspended, or modified, or if the vessel is sold. Although a permit would be issued on an annual basis, an application for its renewal would only be required every 2 years. In the interim years, renewal would be automatic for a vessel owner who has met the specific requirements for the permit. An owner whose permit is expiring would be mailed a notification by the RA approximately 2 months prior to its expiration indicating what actions are required to renew the vessel permit. A vessel owner or dealer who does not receive a permit status notification from the RA, 45 days prior to expiration of the current permit, must contact the RA.

Prohibition of Traps in the Royal Red Shrimp Fishery and Transfer of Royal Red Shrimp At Sea: Royal red shrimp have been a small component of the Gulf of

Mexico shrimp fishery since the early 1960s, traditionally harvested using modified shrimp trawls at depths exceeding 100 fathoms. An emergency interim rule prohibiting trap gear in the royal red shrimp fishery within the EEZ of the Gulf of Mexico was implemented on September 19, 2000, and extended until September 14, 2001.

The intended effect of prohibiting the use of traps in this fishery is to prevent gear conflict that could compromise vessel safety and to prevent overfishing in the royal red shrimp fishery. Gear conflicts are likely to occur between the traditional trawl fishery and the proposed trap line fishery on the royal red shrimp fishing grounds. This could result in substantial damage and loss of fishing gears and an increase in cost for participants in the fishery. Gear conflicts also would introduce vessel safety issues because of the depth of the fishing effort, the weight of the deployed gears (especially if they become tangled), and the fact that the fishing grounds are far offshore. Additionally, the introduction of new fishing effort could lead to overfishing of the resource; since 1993, landings from the traditional trawl fishery have approached the maximum sustainable yield of 392,000 lb for the fishery. Prohibiting the transfer of royal red shrimp in the Gulf EEZ and of royal red shrimp taken in the Gulf EEZ regardless of where the transfer takes place would enhance the enforceability of the prohibition on the use of traps in the fishery.

Dates and Addresses: Copies of Amendment 11, which includes an Environmental Assessment and a Regulatory Impact Review, are available from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, The Commons at Rivergate,

3018 U.S. Highway 301 North, Suite 1000, Tampa Florida 33619-2266. phone: 813-228-2815; fax: 813-833-1844.

Copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from the Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702. Comments should be sent to Dr. Steve Branstetter at the same address, or may be sent via fax to 727-522-5583. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet. All comments on the proposed rule must be received before 4:30 PM eastern time, on April 11, 2002.

Written comments regarding the collection-of-information requirements associated with completing an application form for the proposed permit may be submitted to Robert Sadler, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702, or to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, Washington, DC 20503 (Attention: NOAA Desk Officer).

Additional background and rationale for the measures discussed here are contained in Amendment 11, the availability of which was announced in the Federal Register on July 19, 2001. The public comment period on Amendment 11 expired on September 17, 2001. All comments received on Amendment 11 or on this proposed rule during their respective comment periods will be addressed in the preamble to the final rule.

This and other news releases are available on the Southeast Regional Office homepage at <http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov/>. NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce.